

# MAKING A DIFFERENCE FOR AMERICA'S YOUTH

## Today's Action

- The President and Mrs. Laura Bush highlighted the need to volunteer to help children and teens reach their full potential. Today, Mrs. Bush announced two new important steps:
  - ✓ This fall, Mrs. Bush will convene the first-ever White House Conference on Helping America's Youth. The Conference will promote public awareness of the various problems facing at-risk youth in our Nation, and it will bring together policymakers, research experts, foundations, faith-based and volunteer organizations, educators, coaches, and parents to share examples of what is already working to make a difference in the lives of young Americans, and to generate new ideas that can be used across the country.
  - ✓ Mrs. Bush also announced the creation of a new guide – the “Community Guide to Helping America's Youth: An Assessment Tool for Youth Outreach” – which will be made available at the White House Conference on Helping America's Youth. The guide will be designed to help communities identify the challenges they face and take specific steps to improve the lives of boys and girls living in their areas. The guide will reflect the work of researchers and experts and will be created with input from the U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services, Education, Justice, Labor, Housing and Urban Development, Agriculture, Interior, the Office of National Drug Control Policy, and the Corporation for National and Community Service.

## Background on Helping America's Youth

Young Americans in many communities are at risk. Research has shown that children are less likely to engage in risky behaviors when they are connected to parents, family, school, community, and faith. Risky behaviors, including illegal drug and tobacco use, violence, and early sexual activity, are among the top causes of disease and early death among youth. Statistics show:

- Boys often begin to fall behind girls in elementary school, which leads to higher dropout rates and juvenile delinquency, and they often show signs of behavioral problems early in life.
  - Youth who fall behind in reading have a greater chance of dropping out of high school altogether.
  - Each year, there are approximately 15 million new STD cases in the U.S., and about one-quarter of these are teenagers.
  - Half of all new HIV infections affect those 24 and younger, and almost 900,000 women under the age of 19 become pregnant every year.
  - Injury and violence is the leading cause of death among youth aged 5-19: Motor vehicle crashes account for 31% of all deaths among youth aged 5-19, and alcohol and other drug use is a factor in approximately 41% of all deaths from motor vehicle crashes.
  - Statistics show boys are at greater risk than girls for developing learning disabilities, illiteracy, dropping out of school, substance-abuse problems, violence, juvenile arrest, and early death caused by violent behavior. As boys grow older, risky behaviors, such as alcohol and drug abuse, become more prevalent, and gang involvement increases.
  - In addition, more children are growing up without a father involved in their lives, and studies show an overwhelming number of violent criminals in the United States are males who grew up without fathers involved in their lives.
- **The President and Mrs. Bush Are Committed to Helping America's Youth.** The President and Mrs. Bush believe every American has an opportunity to help children and youth in their families and communities to avoid trouble and lead more hopeful lives. Faith-based, community, and volunteer organizations across the Nation are involved in efforts to reach at-risk youth and get them involved in their communities. The Federal government plays an important role by pursuing policies that help the good works of these organizations.

- **The Importance of Family:** The President and Mrs. Bush believe parents and family are the first and most important influence in every child's life, providing a foundation of love and support. The President's FY 2006 budget supports families in many ways, including:
  - ✓ Promoting Responsible Fatherhood: The President requested \$40 million for a new fatherhood initiative to be awarded in competitive grants to faith-based and community organizations for skill-based marriage and parenting education, and other services that help fathers provide emotional and financial support to their children.
  - ✓ Encouraging Healthy Marriages: The President has requested \$100 million for a state-based competitive matching grant program to support healthy marriages, and an additional \$100 million for research, demonstration projects, and technical assistance on family formation and healthy marriage activities.
- **The Importance of School:** Schools equip children with the knowledge and skills to be successful throughout their lives. The President's FY 2006 budget helps to ensure America's schools are producing results for every child in America and includes initiatives focused on children at-risk.
  - ✓ The President's Striving Readers initiative focuses on improving the reading skills of high school students who read below grade level. This Presidential initiative, first funded in 2005, builds on the No Child Left Behind elementary school reading initiatives. The President's FY 2006 budget will provide \$200 million, an increase of \$175 million and eight times the 2005 enacted level, to improve the reading skills of these high school students.
  - ✓ Character education provides children with the tools to develop moral and ethical strength. The President has requested more than \$24 million for the Character Education Initiative to encourage schools and school districts to develop curricula that teach strong values, promote good character, and help children develop a sense of responsibility to the community.
- **The Importance of Community:** What matters most in a child's life is a loving, caring adult, whether that is a parent, teacher, coach, pastor, or mentor. The needs of at-risk youth will not be addressed solely by the Federal government, but by communities in partnership with parents and families, government, schools, and faith-based and community groups. The President created the USA Freedom Corps and the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives to help more Americans in need.
  - ✓ The President has proposed, in his FY 2006 budget, a new, three-year, \$150-million initiative to help youth at risk of gang influence and involvement through grants to faith-based and community organizations. These organizations will provide a positive model for youth – one that respects women and rejects violence.
  - ✓ The President has proposed, in his FY 2006 budget, an additional \$50 million for mentoring the children of prisoners. The initiative, in its second year, will help 100,000 children over three years find the support they need to succeed.
  - ✓ To encourage teens to take personal responsibility for their actions and to encourage parents to educate their children about the dangers of early sexual activity, the President has proposed \$206 million for an abstinence initiative, including: doubling the funding for abstinence-only education programs over three years; developing model abstinence-only education curricula; ensuring the Federal government is sending a consistent message to teens; and creating a public education campaign for parents and teens about this important issue.